

Keith Mehlin: Everything is not as it seems on television 03/01/2004

How many times have we watched the good guy on TV or a movie enter into fisticuffs with one or two or 20 bad guys and end up the victor, with not even as much as a torn shirt or bloody nose?

I would venture to say that we have all watched time and time again people being hit with fists, knees, elbows, blunt objects, furniture, animals and the occasional kitchen sink, with very little damage being done.

We have seen blows delivered to peoples heads that in real life would probably have killed them, or at least turned them into vegetables. In the media they simply shake their heads and keep on fighting.

We see people being hit with objects that would break bones or turn muscle into a twitching mass, and incapacitate them. On TV, they don't even flinch.

I also wonder how many times we have watched TV or movie police officers subdue bad guys who are actively resisting without hurting them or getting hurt by them, or really even breaking out into a sweat. They use a sophisticated joint or pressure point technique and presto, the fight is over.

I would venture to say that we have all marveled at how easy it is for these officers to cuff and stuff these terrible people so easily.

I believe that we have watched this so much in the entertainment media that many of us have come to believe that's the way it is in real life.

Well folks, let me once again remind you that entertainment and real life are two very different things.

Let me address the injury part in today's piece, and next time I will talk about just how tough it is to subdue and cuff someone who does not want to go to jail.

I have some perspective on this subject for a couple of reasons.

The obvious is that I worked the street for several years and both observed and was involved with people resisting arrest. I also observed the aftermath of fights. People get hurt!

I also was involved in the martial arts for 12 years, earning a brown belt in a mainland Japanese karate style, and a black belt in an Okinawa karate style. I tested for my black belt in front of my sensei (teacher) and his sensei who was here from Okinawa.

I fought full contact, no protection karate matches where the only thing you could not do was kick to the groin or punch directly to the face. These were not the "tough man" contests that you hear about now, which I personally detest, but matches where points were awarded if the person was knocked down, or could not continue to fight for several seconds. Contestants were matched up on ability, and very seldom was someone knocked out.

While I have not trained since my sensei moved to the west coast, I still remember the cracked ribs, broken toes, broken hand and numerous bruises.

One thing that my experiences have taught me is that if people hit each other with fists, elbows, knees or feet, they are going to hurt each other.

If people hit each other with objects, they are going to seriously hurt each other. That is a fact of life. That fact is true if you are a bad guy or a police officer. We all hurt the same.

Last week the county attorney won a first-degree murder trial in which a person was beat to death with fists and feet. There are many murders that involve only personal weapons such as that example, or blunt objects.

I recall a murder in Omaha some time ago where a person was struck in the jaw once with a fist, fell to the ground, hit his head on a curb and died.

I think that the entertainment media has done us a disfavor by portraying acts of violence in which nobody seems to get hurt.

I believe that some people, particularly young people, believe that they can imitate the movies, and not really hurt anyone. I have only talked about the trauma caused by striking another person, I have not even mentioned knives and guns.

I guess my point is that when you are being entertained by a fight scene on TV or in a movie, try and remember that in the real world, a fight means that someone is going to get hurt.

If you have kids who are being influenced by the entertainment media, and all kids are, try to teach them that hitting someone with a fist or an object means hurting that person, perhaps permanently, and there will be repercussions.

Even if they don't get hurt themselves, they will probably have to face legal consequences, another thing you seldom see on TV.

- Keith Mehlin is chief of the Council Bluffs Police Department